



In 1930, Gen. Billy Mitchell wrote a book entitled *Skyways*. He began this basic text of “modern” aeronautics with this truism: “We humans fly. We have launched ourselves into what we call the air, a fluid that covers the earth like a blanket. Wherever this blanket extends, there we can go. As it covers the whole world, all places are accessible to the flyer.”

Unfortunately, the limitations of most general aviation airplanes prevent venturing much beyond the North and South Americas. But considering the proliferation of bargain basement airline fares, it has become easier to buy one’s way to a more remote portion of General Mitchell’s “blanket” and, once there, revert to further exploration by light-plane. Soaring above foreign ports-of-call on rented wings

# FLYING IN **NEW ZEALAND**

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offers decidedly more enjoyment and perspective than touring by road or rail.

New Zealand is one such place that beckons general aviation pilots. Rental craft are available at only slightly more than U.S. rates, the diversified topography is spectacular, and the Kiwis (New Zealanders) are among the most gracious hosts to be found anywhere. And in a world where the welcome mat for Americans appears to be shriveling, this is a quality to savor.

But some mental adjustments are required. Since New Zealand is deep in the Southern Hemisphere, a U.S. pilot must contend with winds that blow *clockwise* about a low and adapt quickly to summer flying when blizzards are on the rampage at home.

Adding to the topsy-turvy conditions at the bottom of the world are upside-down constellations, a sun that drifts across the *northern* sky and the absence of Polaris, our celestial compass and compatriot. (The Southern Cross, however, is almost as useful.)

On a more terrestrial plane, cars are driven on the left side of the street, door knobs are turned the "wrong" way and electrical switches are flipped up to turn things off.

But before a "Yank" can rent an airplane, he first must study New Zealand air laws and pass a written exam to prove his familiarity with them.

Most of these regs are similar to ours with some noteworthy exceptions. Since New Zealand is aligned north and south, cruise altitudes are 90 degrees out of sync with *our*

hemispheric rule. When flying a northerly course (270° to 089°), an odd altitude (plus 500 feet) is used; a southerly course (090° to 269°) requires flying at an even altitude. Kiwis claim this is as easy as following your NOSE (North, Odd; South, Even).

Additionally, oxygen is required at all times when 10,000 feet or above and VFR requires a minimum visibility of five miles. Every pilot (including students) over 40 is required to submit to an EKG every two years and those over 50 must do so every year.

Regulatory demands then become particularly more burdensome. An instrument rating and an IFR-equipped aircraft are required to fly either at night or in most of the airspace above 9,500 feet at all times. This is particularly distressing when you consider that such an aircraft must be equipped with dual navcom, dual sensitive altimeters and dual airspeed indicators. Additionally, each pair of instruments must be supplied by its own static and heated pitot source. (By the way, Kiwis quaintly refer to a turn-and-bank indicator as a "bat-and-ball.")

Also, the demonstrated crosswind limits shown in the operating manuals of U.S.-built aircraft are regarded as maximum legal limits in New Zealand. (In the States, of course, these limits are only advisory and usually reflect only the maximum crosswind available during certification trials.)

To ensure that a pilot pays proper attention to aircraft loading, he is required to turn in a load manifest prior to any flight during which a passenger is to be carried in excess of 25 miles. This must include passenger names and weights, fuel load, baggage on board, etc. But local pilots are quick to point out that the regs do not specify where this manifest is to be deposited. They are prepared to claim, with tongue in cheek, that the required paperwork was secured beneath a rock at the departure airport. It's up to the authorities to find the rock.

Curiously, no demands are made of the pilot to compute center-of-gravity prior to every flight. Kiwi pilots are expressly grateful for at least this reprieve.

One commendable regulation, however, requires that all aircraft be equipped with fire axes to be used during post-crash evacuation and first-aid kits to increase the likelihood of survival. Personally, I would favor such an FAA regulation. (Open cockpit aircraft, by the way, are exempt from the fire-ax provision.)

The New Zealand bureaucracy seems to have an enthusiasm for legislation. Were it not for the good-natured determination of the country's 10,000 pilots, it is felt that the government might unwittingly strangle general aviation in the interest of safety. (After all, if no one flies, there won't be any accidents, will there?) There is concern that additional regulation could turn local pilots into genuine kiwis, which are, after all, a species of nearly extinct, flightless birds.

As in most foreign countries, the best place to rent an aircraft is at an aero club. Aero clubs originally were financed by the New Zealand government to foster aviation development. But after the subsidy well ran dry, the clubs evolved into fixed-base operations similar to those in the States. They did, however, retain the club atmosphere and camaraderie. Major activities include conventional fly-ins and "breakfast raids," a sporting proposition where the members of one club fly to another for the purpose of raiding that club's pantry.

One of New Zealand's largest is the Auckland Aero Club at Ardmore Airport, a pastoral setting south of Auckland's suburbs. Here (or elsewhere) the American pilot can rent either U.S.-built machines or perhaps be tempted to fly a New Zealand-built Airtourer.

Originally manufactured in Australia as the Victa Airtourer, these spunky, aerobatic two-place aircraft are similar in appearance and flight characteristics to the Grumman-

## FLYING IN NEW ZEALAND



*Shades of yesteryear—milk is still home delivered in bottles, for pennies a quart. In downtown Christchurch babies are allowed on the buses but their strollers ride outside on "pram" hooks. At Wellington an ageless Bristol Freighter plies its trade, and the more modern Cessna 207 takes tourists sightseeing over North Island's volcanic region.*





American singles. The Airtourer, however, has a unique control system. In normal flight, moving the "pole" (control stick) laterally not only deflects the ailerons, but causes asymmetric flap deflection as well, which results in full-span ailerons. With flaps extended, both ailerons droop resulting in full-span flaps *and* full-span ailerons.

Although the Airtourer is no longer in production, it remains popular with New Zealand's aero clubs.

The only general aviation aircraft currently in production in New Zealand is the Fletcher FU-24-950, an agplane originally built by industrialist Wendell Fletcher in Southern California. Although equipped with a 400-hp Lycoming, a more powerful turboprop version, the "Cresco," soon will be available.

No matter what aircraft a pilot intends to rent, he must first obtain a formal type rating. One is needed for each aircraft type in which he intends to fly as pilot-in-command. In reality, such a rating is little more than a checkout, but it does give the bureaucrats additional paper to process.

The New Zealand government recently formulated a plan to dispense with type ratings in favor of "group" ratings. When qualified to fly one aircraft within a particular group, a pilot would then be certificated to fly all other aircraft within the same group. Aircraft are to be grouped according to number of engines (one or two), propeller (fixed or constant speed) and landing gear (fixed or retractable, nose-



wheel or tailwheel).

New Zealand, which is smaller than California, consists primarily of two islands. Its size belies the wonders to be seen. The visitor discovers a kaleidoscopic treasure of natural beauty with perhaps more spectacles per square mile than anywhere else.

Our flight plan was to span it all, from the balmy, subtropical beaches of the North Island, across the narrow Cook Strait to the Norwegian-like fjords of the South Island. Filing a flight plan is a relatively painless affair. To encourage pilots to comply with this requirement and obtain a briefing, the benevolent bureaucracy pays the tab whenever a long-distance call is required.

Flying a lightplane over new horizons is a thrilling, fascinating experience and provides an appreciation that is not possible otherwise. Local customs and procedures do cause occasional moments of anxiety, but this adds spice to the adventure. Even though we were strangers in a foreign land, the familiarity of a Beechcraft Sierra cockpit did help us feel at home.

Fortunately, New Zealand's primary language is English so en route communications became progressively easier as we learned to pronounce the Polynesian (Maori) names assigned to most checkpoints. Some names, such as Whata-

# FLYING IN NEW ZEALAND



"Braided" stream near Christchurch can't seem to pick a channel.

whata and Paraparaumu, are amusing, but we were grateful for not having to report passing over Taumatawhakatangihangakoauauatamateaturipuka kapinaungahoronukupokaiwhenuakitanatahu. Reputedly, this 83-letter name is the world's longest. (Don't ask for the translation, please.)

Navigation in New Zealand is conventional. An abundance of VORTAC's overlay a spiderweb of airways that lead almost everywhere. Figuring GMT is particularly easy because the country is only slightly west of the date line; in other words, GMT and local time are the same (plus or minus half a day).

Approaching Rotorua, our first stop, I consulted the invaluable Visual Flight Guide. This loose-leaf book is published by the government and is sort of a Jeppesen manual for VFR pilots that contains a visual landing chart for every airport in the country. In addition to containing airport layouts, local frequencies and other expected data, each airport page also provides traffic pattern specifications, notes of caution, the slope of each runway and everything else a visiting pilot needs or would like to know.

Some caution notes are amusing. Consider this remark on the airport chart for Hawera: "Heavily grazed by sheep. Runway surface liable to be 'greasy' even in dry weather. Braking action fair to poor." (Speaking of sheep, there are more than 60 million in New Zealand, and they outnumber humans 20 to 1.)

Several airports, by the way, are within the infields of race tracks. My, wouldn't this be a classy way to take your companion to the horse races?

Also included on an airport chart is the performance number of each runway, a figure that quickly informs a pilot whether a given runway is sufficiently long for his aircraft. The performance number is based on runway length, slope, surface, actual obstructions (if any), elevation, calm wind and maximum temperature to be expected there.

Each aircraft type also is assigned a performance number based on its takeoff, climb and landing capabilities. When the aircraft performance number is less than or equal to the performance number of a given runway, the pilot knows—without having to consult performance charts in the aircraft handbook—that the runway in question is sufficiently long (except during downwind operations).

Visual landing charts also display the VFR minimums for each airport. That's right, VFR minimums vary from one airport to the next (depending on local topography). At

Milford Sound, for example, where the immediate terrain is steep and rocky, a 2,500-foot ceiling and 16 kilometers (10 nm) are required. But at Christchurch, where the terrain is flat, only 1,500 feet and 8 kilometers (5 nm) are needed for VFR operations. When you think about it, variable, VFR minimums is a logical concept.

Approaching Rotorua in the predusk calm, we descended over the spectacular Waimang Thermal Valley where it appears that all hell has broken loose. This highly active, geothermal region is heavily pockmarked with geysers, bubbling craters of volcanic mud and colorful cauldrons that seem the creation of an alchemist. Awesome and impressive is Mt. Terawera, which was split open so severely by a volcanic eruption that when flying overhead a pilot can gaze through the yawning crevice to the very bowels of the mountain.

Wellington, the nation's capital, is on the southern tip of the North Island and is a magnificent sight from the air. The beautiful harbor is the stage for an amphitheater of hills to which clings the city. The setting is reminiscent of San Francisco or Hong Kong.

Wellington Airport is on land that did not exist prior to 1855. That is when a powerful earthquake caused an underwater isthmus to rise from the sea and provide a handy place for an airport. Considering the frequency of tremblers in the area, it seemed uncomfortably possible that another quake might return the airport to the depths before we would have had a chance to leave.

Since the land slopes up and away from both sides of the single runway, there is no room for a control tower from which to adequately observe traffic. So, one was built on a vacant lot between two houses in an adjacent, residential area.

After the brief, 20-mile flight across the foamy, wind-swept Cook Strait to the South Island, we headed to and paralleled the island's mountainous spine, the Southern Alps. Proud, towering peaks glisten with snowfields and ice packs. Frowning, rocky precipices furrow their sides, and standing mightily above them all is the majestic grandeur of Mt. Cook, which rises sharply from sea level to 12,349 feet.

Cruising along in the Sierra, we were afforded an eagle's-eye view of glacial tongues of ice that etch and carve their way to subtropical forests and warm valleys that are squeezed between the base of the Alps and the waters of the Tasman Sea.

We had intended to buy tickets for the thrilling adventure of landing on a glacier in one of Mt. Cook Airline's ski-equipped Cessna 185's, but conditions on the glaciers were not favorable at the time. In the winter, the Tasman Glacier offers a superb, 15-mile ski run for those one-way passengers who are properly equipped.

After touring the remainder of the South Island (we weren't able to include the grandeur of Milford Sound because of unfavorable weather), we pointed the Sierra's nose toward lovely Christchurch, which has more the flavor of an English city than one on an island in the South Pacific.

Christchurch has the only airport with a special check-in counter for Antarctica-bound passengers. During our winter, when it is summer at the frozen continent, the airport is bustling with polar activity. Christchurch is the staging area for the U.S. Navy's "Operation Deep Freeze."

In a way, New Zealand is reminiscent of the United States 30 or 40 years ago. Milk is still home-delivered in glass bottles (for pennies a quart), doctors still make house calls (and charge very little for them), and tipping is refused because people feel adequately paid. New Zealand living is informal, congenial and lacks the pressures and abrasiveness of big-city America.

And the best way to survey New Zealand's mecca of unspoiled beauty is from aloft; the flying is great. □